



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NATIONALISM IN MUSIC.

BY REGINALD DE KOVEN.

It is a fact, as well known as it is to be regretted, that, in Music alone of all the arts and sciences, no American so far, with the possible exception of McDowell, has struck that dominating note of supreme mastership which compels unquestioned and universal recognition. In painting, in sculpture and in architecture; in poetry and in general literature in all its varying and varied moods and modes of expression, Americans have won an entrance into the inner shrine of fame, and occupied high places in the assembly of the great ones of the earth.

While it is admitted that Music is the last art to develop in any civilization, it must also be admitted that our civilization and general culture have reached a point which would predicate a degree of development in Music commensurate with our progress in other and kindred fields of creative activity.

To find any one able or willing to set a definite bound or limit to our national possibilities of artistic achievement in any given direction, in view of existing national artistic accomplishment, would, I think, be difficult. Hence, it must be possible to adduce good and sufficient reasons for the existing conditions which it is the purpose of this article to consider, and for which, having once assigned an intelligible cause, it may also be possible to point out a remedy. In the consideration of this subject from every varying standpoint, I would advance the opinion, as practically axiomatic, that, given a demand, the supply will in due course necessarily follow; and that opportunity makes the man more often than man the opportunity. In apt illustration of the above, it may be observed that the French Opéra Comique, an institution which has perhaps done more for Music as an art than any other similar institution in the world's his-

tory, was not created by the school of composers which has given it glory, but was itself the creator of that school.

The causes, as I see them, which may reasonably be held responsible for the lack of creative musical productiveness that gives to America as a music-producing nation a position inferior to all other civilized countries, are twofold—first, those superficial causes which are readily recognizable by almost any one as determining; and, second, those more subtle and underlying causes which penetrate to and affect the very soul and origin of Music as an art, in its less readily appreciable relations to the minds and hearts, and purely æsthetic feelings, of mankind.

Foremost among the first, I would place what is a distinctive and perhaps racial tendency—that easy adaptability which, together with a high degree of restless, nervous impatience, is perhaps the most salient characteristic of the American people to-day. As a nation, we are only too prone to race to a desired result with seven-league boots of impatience, which so hurriedly cross the intermediate stages as to render mature and rounded achievement, founded on the solid structure of logical training and development, in most cases an impossibility.

Again, the development of Music in this country has had to contend with a decided and wide-spread inclination among our solid men to consider the study of Music as an art both trivial and unworthy. This is one of the legacies left us by those good old stiff-necked Puritans whose influence still obtains and crops up in most unexpected quarters; those sturdy forefathers of ours who looked upon Music in any form as a bedevilment and invention of the Evil One, a foe alike to piety, morality and good manners. It was not so long ago that, even in England, a man who studied Music, or played upon a stringed instrument, was referred to slightly and with disparagement as a “Fiddler”; and it was a translation of this feeling into this country which prompted the remark made to me some years ago by a gentleman, a leader of the Bar, and representing the literary culture of his important community, that “any man who devoted any attention to Music was little better than a fool.” The tendency inevitable in a new country, where the commercial spirit is the controlling agent of progress, to measure artistic work solely by a financial standard of value has also been a hindrance to the development of our artistic possibilities.

Another readily intelligible reason for our lack of musical productiveness, hitherto, may well lie in the fact that America is only beginning to develop a leisure class. The hurry and bustle, the ceaseless activity and strenuous energy of our everyday life, have left us little time for meditation, contemplation or the development and cultivation of the higher emotions. Music is the natural expression, the wordless language, of a part of our being, which our universal business and commercial pursuits have not only failed to foster, but of necessity have retarded and kept in the background. The marked development of musical taste among the general public during the last ten years has gone hand in hand with the formation of a leisure class among us. We must have leisure before we can enjoy; for intelligent enjoyment, properly speaking, belongs to the legitimate exercise of our higher faculties.

Again, the profession of Music is not as a rule a lucrative one. The musician looking towards fame, and towards the development of his highest artistic possibilities, is lucky indeed who makes a bare living. Art is a hard and jealous mistress, and requires of us our supreme energy and most arduous toil for the production of just those artistic results which are likely to secure the smallest meed of public appreciation, and therefore the least material compensation; in other words, the maximum of creative energy for the minimum of financial return. Therefore the desire for wealth, that unending strenuous chase after the almighty dollar which is a national characteristic, prevents many a man possessing the natural talents and aptitude from cultivating an art which in all probability would advance his material interests so little, and thus forms another and most potent cause for our tardy development in an art which is, beyond doubt or question, the most refining, cultivating and civilizing influence in any community.

Another important and self-evident cause is the fact that, until very recently, it has been almost, if not quite, impossible for any one aspiring to musical proficiency to obtain the necessary education and training in this country. What facilities for musical education we have hitherto enjoyed have been for the most part of the wrong kind, and such training as could be obtained was both unsystematic and superficial. As a case in

point, and of personal knowledge, I may state that, in a reputable well-known so-called "College of Music" in a large city (both of which shall be nameless), a gentleman was permitted to teach singing and the rudiments of harmony, whose only musical training had been a course of six months' instruction in the same institution. What artistic results could be expected from such a system? Like instances might be multiplied throughout the length and breadth of this great country, where musical instruction (falsely so-called) is too often incompetent and through misleading pretence often dishonest.

Another determining cause of existing conditions which must not be overlooked or underestimated in its effects, has been the lack of the musical atmosphere to create and stimulate musical thought, so necessary to the cultivation and artistic advancement of the musical student. The absence in this country of such an atmosphere—alone created by opportunities for constant hearing of the best music of all kinds at reasonable prices—has sent our would-be musicians abroad, where such opportunities are readily obtainable, in ever-increasing numbers. Having thus been obliged to go elsewhere for what has been hitherto unattainable here, our foreign-trained musicians have naturally and unavoidably in their musical expression been, for the greater part, a reflection of the environment in which their artistic training has been gained; and this evident tendency brings us naturally to the underlying causes above mentioned, to which, in my judgment, more than to anything else, the existing lack of distinctive national musical creativeness is due.

National music has been defined as that music which, appertaining to a nation or tribe whose individual emotions and passions it expresses, exhibits certain peculiarities more or less characteristic, which distinguish it from the music of any other nation or tribe. To such music the Germans very appropriately give the designation of "*Volksmusik*," which term, for present purposes I think, it may be permissible to render into English as "Folk-Music." The absolute lack in American music, so-called, of the characteristic peculiarities which would give to the expression of thought or character in music anything distinctive or national, is to me the principal underlying cause for the tardy development of our musical creative ability, and

for the absence of general recognition for the American composer.

Music to be great, and universally recognized as such, must in a sense be national; and the history of the art shows that the best music has been written in those countries where the greatest amount of national feeling prevails. It is now pretty generally admitted that the Anglo-Saxon race is not markedly musical in its tendencies, and thus far the predominating race-type in this country has been the Anglo-Saxon. This is fast disappearing, and we are beginning to feel the effect of the enormous immigration of the last half-century, and the infusion into the original American stock of the blood of European nations.

The American people is now; the American Nation is yet to be.

Until we shall finally and once for all have done away with the hyphenated nationalities, and the consequently divided national feeling, which still exert an important influence on our musical life, we cannot expect to have a national feeling which in expression shall be distinctively American and recognizable as such.

Further than this, until this feeling is generated by the slow process of national assimilation and progress, we can hardly hope for that distinctive school of music which is the prime essential to our national musical development. Whoever it was that said, "Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws," enunciated a truth having to do with the effect of distinctively national music upon a nation or people, whose importance can hardly be overlooked. The popular airs of a nation might well be called the almost unconscious soul utterances of the people. They grow, they develop—how, one hardly knows; for, as some one aptly remarked, "Really popular melodies compose themselves." Their very existence in many instances is due to some great national crisis, to some wave of national feeling or emotion. At times, they emerge from the fiery crucible of a nation's anguish; at other times, the irrepressible outburst of a nation's joy gives them birth. As an evidence of the non-productive effect, from a musical standpoint, of a divided national feeling, it may be said that the agitated passions and emotions of the Civil War brought into existence a number of melodies and popular songs, which, from their melodic contents,

might well rank with many of the most characteristic folk-songs and popular airs of foreign nations; and yet none of these songs were taken permanently to the hearts of the people, and almost all have disappeared with the memories of that great conflict. Possibly, some other great national crisis is needed to weld the American people into a Nation upon which a united national feeling could be indelibly stamped, and thus become productive of lasting musical result.

It is a curious fact that no great national music has ever been written among a people living under a republican form of government. The Swiss are, perhaps, the oldest example of a people living permanently under that régime, and there has never been a Swiss composer of any note or of even moderate ability. Against this it may be urged that the American Democracy is unquestionably *sui generis*; that nothing like it has ever existed before; and that for this reason, being in a position to make precedent for ourselves, we need not necessarily consider Democracy *per se* as inimical to musical development. On the contrary, the very variety of the elements which are now forming the American nation would argue in favor of the possibility of the foundation of a National School of Music, which, in uniting the characteristics of many peoples, might in time develop into something broader and stronger, fresher, more vital and more spontaneous than anything the world has hitherto seen. As a people to-day we have an eminently original, inventive and constructive faculty; and, when the rapid civilizing and developing processes which we are now undergoing shall have given us more leisure, and shall have broadened our perceptions to the extent of enabling us to see in the cultivation of the arts, and more particularly of the art of Music, one of the noblest fields for the exercise of human energy, we may reasonably expect to see the American composer take a place in the world of music more in keeping with the existing development of the country in other fields of artistic effort.

But the question of the progress and development of music in this country naturally and immediately suggests the necessity of the foundation of the National School of Music above mentioned. Admitting this, the further question at once arises, What should be the basis and foundation of such a school?

If it be true, as has been said, that the best music has been

written in those countries where the greatest amount of national feeling prevails, it might be claimed that the necessary foundations of this school should be those popular airs or folk-tunes which, to a certain extent, form the basis of the so-called national music of Europe; and the question may be argued *pro* and *con* as to whether such music is the necessary basis of a national school, or whether this folk-music, which ordinarily comes to us from a past so remote that its primary origin is practically undiscoverable, is an effect or cause of national feeling. I am inclined to believe that folk-music may, at one and the same time, be both an effect and a cause.

That united national feeling which we as a country are yet too young to have developed, which in times of national joy or grief finds a spontaneous expression in music, either as an accompaniment to appropriate words, or as an expression of thought beyond the power of language, must first exist before the lasting foundations of a distinctive national school of music can be laid. Otherwise, we should have had such a school in America long ago; for, as has been often observed, there is in this country an almost inexhaustible fund of folk-music of the most varied kind—the Negro, Indian and Creole—on which the American composer could have drawn had he been so minded. That he has not done so more generally would seem to indicate that neither to the composer, nor to the public to whom his work is addressed, does this music in any way represent or suggest a feeling that would inspire or attract because of any inherent properties of appropriate national application which it possesses. In the rare instances where composers have sought inspiration in music of this kind, like McDowell's "Indian Suite" or Dvorák's "New World" symphony, their music has not appealed to Americans as representatively national, nor been taken to their hearts as such, for the reason that all such tunes and melodies are really exotic and in no sense indigenous. If we admit that this folk-music, characteristic and original as it is, should be taken as the proper basis of a national school of music, we must also be prepared to admit that the Indian, the Negro and the Creole are the dominant race-types of America, which is absurd. Far more am I inclined to look to the popular tunes of to-day, however deficient in intrinsic musical value, which are being sung familiarly by hundreds of thousands of people, as a possible

foundation for a school of music expressive of national thought and character and appealing as such to the Nation, than to these Creole, Negro or Indian melodies, indicative only of the emotions and sentiment of alien races which have had little or nothing to do with our national upbuilding, and are now fast disappearing.

I do not mean to infer that, because the folk-music to be found in this country may not be thought properly available as the basis of a national school of music, the careful study of it might not be advantageous to the American composer and music student. The great variety of rhythm and modulation which it contains affords an inexhaustible source of useful suggestion; while, from the deep and beautiful expression contained in many of the melodies, they may be profitably followed as excellent models in composition. The chief advantage, however, in the study of folk-music lies in the fact that such music is in most cases what music primarily always should be—a faithful expression of feeling. The professional musician has many inducements to compose music which he does not really feel; and therefore a familiarity with national or folk-music in which absolute truth of expression predominates cannot fail to be beneficial to him.

The example of almost all the great composers who have made use of national or folk melodies, either by introducing them bodily into their works, or by adopting their salient characteristics, can well be heeded in this respect; and the many instances where such folk-music has had a definite and direct influence on the style and the form of melodic expression of the composers employing it may be taken as proof that such music may justly be looked upon as a cause rather than an effect of national feeling musically expressed. The famous composer, Grieg, furnishes a striking example of how the use of characteristic national melodies may affect and even completely alter a composer's style. Had he not intentionally abandoned his former German manner, and so imbued himself with the form and spirit of the folk-music of his own country, Grieg could never have attained his present rank as a distinctively individual and original composer. But the fact must be insisted on that the melodies which he made use of bore the impress of an already existing national character and feeling, both definite and unmistakable, and that music of this class has not as yet been a possibility in America,

because the concrete well-defined national feeling to produce it has not been present.

It may well be, as observed above, that the gradual unification into a nation of the various foreign elements which now constitute the American people, may in time produce an undivided national feeling definite enough to find a spontaneous expression in that folk-music which, as in Grieg's case, could show definite result in the upbuilding of a composer whose work might be deemed characteristically national. The very existence in this country of the differing taste in music inevitable to our various hyphenated nationalities, must be held to be another underlying cause for the backwardness of our musical development, as having to do with those foreign influences which so strongly affect our musical life, much, as I believe, to its detriment. With German-Americans clamoring for German music; with Italian-Americans demanding only Italian music to the extent of refusing even to listen to music of the French school; and with Americans of all kinds apparently willing to sanction and give heed to only such music as is European, it is perhaps a little difficult to know where the audience to stimulate the activity of the American composer by a willingness to listen to what he has to say musically may be found.

In this connection, I would quote from a recent article in the "Review of Reviews" by Mr. Arthur Farwell, an American composer who has done much to encourage native musical activity, who, in speaking of the estimation in which the American composer is held by his countrymen and the difficulty experienced by Americans in obtaining a hearing in their own country, says:

"Artists with rare exceptions will not learn and perform American works, however high may be their opinion of them, in a society which still really sanctions only that which is European. Here was another intolerable condition. A changed social attitude is necessary. There must be wide-spread and organized performance of American works, before the country has at last found that it is the gainer and not the loser by an entirely liberal hospitality to the work of Americans."

The opportunities for hearing music, which have grown and multiplied exceedingly in recent years, have increased not only the attention paid to music and the enjoyment to be derived therefrom by all classes of people, but also the consideration in which music as a factor in social life is held.

It is now said that the American musician has reached a point where he needs no apology. This statement has been, and may be, taken in two ways. If, as meaning that the American composer has arrived at a point where, having mastered the technical details of his calling, he is now in a position as a craftsman to rank with the best and to be judged by his honest qualifications and merits and not by any sentimental standard of mere nationality, it is all very well. If, however, this dictum be taken to mean that the American musician, with all the difficulty he has had and still has to contend with, is considered strong enough to meet single-handed, and without the definite support from his countrymen which a larger confidence in his ability would give, the competition with the musical products of nations centuries older than his own, it is, I think, misleading. It is that lack of national confidence in national ability, from which the manifold difficulties the American composer encounters in obtaining a hearing spring, which is also a principal underlying cause of our retarded development in the field of musical creativeness.

More frequent opportunities of public performance the American composer at this time both sadly lacks and urgently needs; for how can the work of any composer be properly judged unheard? Such opportunities are essential as an after result of creative effort not only in giving the public the opportunity of judging a composer by his work, but also in supplying the composer with the needed stimulus and incentive of popular recognition and appreciation, and in enabling him to estimate his own accomplishment with greater clearness and accuracy.

It has been recently stated by a writer on musical topics that it is incredible, and impossible to suppose, that a worthy musical work by an American composer would be refused due and proper recognition by the American public because of its American origin, and that it is therefore unnecessary and unprofitable to bring before the public musical works by American composers of unknown or doubtful merit. Of what good to any one are silent scores and unpublished manuscripts that gather dust on library shelves? My own personal experience has taught me that the unwillingness of the American public to accept native musical works because of their American origin is neither incredible nor impossible to suppose. Our youth as a musical nation, which makes us diffident about expressing a definite opinion unsupported

by previous foreign criticism, is largely responsible for a condition of affairs as undoubted as it is unfortunate.

It is national pride as well as national feeling that begets national art—that Nationalism in Music, which we need to become the musical nation that our natural characteristics seem to point to as something more than a possibility.

As bearing on the above, it is indeed much to be deplored that the terms of the competition for a prize for the best American Grand Opera, as recently announced by the Metropolitan Opera Company, an idea admirable in its conception in affording the needed opportunity for the American composer to be heard, are such as to render the whole plan nugatory and indeed almost farcical. Through the illiberality and injustice of its financial conditions, whereby the composer, for a sum barely adequate to compensate him for the time spent in its construction, is compelled to give his successful work for nothing for a period of five years, and whereby they carefully reserve to themselves the right not to award any prize at all, the Metropolitan Opera Company have, in my judgment, given conclusive evidence of their entire inability to appreciate existing conditions, as well as of the usual lack of confidence in the ability of the American composer to produce any meritorious musical work at all—a direct outcome of the foreign influences which hamper and retard our national progress and development.

France is to-day the centre of the art-producing world. That she is so is largely due to the fact that the French people prefer to hear French music, to see French pictures and statuary, and go to the theatre to hear French plays—meaning, in each instance, the works of Frenchmen—than those of any other nationality. Such a national confidence in national ability is undoubtedly the greatest possible incentive and stimulus to artistic effort. When once we are willing to admit, as the French do in regard to themselves, that the work of Americans is and can be of itself good and worthy, and if found equal to the works of others when judged by similar standards, should be preferred to them, we shall stand a better chance than we have to-day of developing in this country a musical art which, as an outgrowth of national feeling, shall be furthermore distinctly national because supported by national confidence and pride.

REGINALD DE KOVEN.